DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 038 SP 014 050

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TITLE Making the Teacher/Advisor System Work. (Functions, Comparisons, Concepts).
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 7p.; For related document, see SP 014 048

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Guidance Programs; Critical Thinking; Discovery Learning; *Educational Counseling; *Faculty Advisors; Human Development; *Learning Processes; Program Planning; Secondary Education; *Student Motivation; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Responding to today's high school students' human needs as well as educational needs necessitates that the teacher return to serving as an adult friend during their school life. Administrators are helping to set the stage for facilitating learning how to learn, and teacher/advisors are drawing upon many aspects of their personality and human dynamics abilities to be more helpful to the student. Some specific functions of these new roles are: (1) the human development function; (2) the crisis assistance function; (3) the student-parent-teacher conference function; and (4) the program planning function. The role of the teacher/advisor is different from the role in traditional teaching, the focus being on experiential learning, personal expression, and critical thinking, rather than on traditional content learning. The teacher/advisory system relies heavily on the concept of student responsibility for their own learning and is a response to societal pressures on teachers and the roles they play in education. (DS)

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ED169038

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MAKING THE TEACHER/ADVISOR SYSTEM WORK

(Functions, Comparisons, Concepts)

by
James B. Aiken

Forces are at work in society encouraging educators to modify traditional roles of the high school teacher. One response to these forces is the Teacher/Advisor System in which a teacher meets with a small number of freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors in one group and utilizes group dynamics, develops supportive, trusting, and caring relationships during their high school life. Many schools utilize group meetings for functions such as human development, student program planning, student-parent-teacher conferences, and personal crises assistance. In the past, these areas have been diverted to guidance counselors, ministers and other culturally acceptable advisors. This traditional advisory relationship has led to the general exclusion of the classroom teacher in helping situations. Responding to today's high school student's human needs as well as educational needs necessitates that the teacher return to serving as an adult friend during their school life. A combination of modifying daily schedules, re-definition of rules, providing in-service training, and utilizing research findingsof behavioral science are some of the ingredients of Teacher/Advisor role change efforts.

Administrators are helping to set the stage for facilitating learning how to learn and Teacher/Advisors are drawing upon many aspects of their personality and human dynamics abilities to be more helpful to the student. It is upsetting to change schedules and difficult to update skills and know-how in all the diverted areas. It is possible, however. Success stories are being documented at an increasing rate. As might be anticipated all are not total successes. We are learning, however, not only from complete success but also from varying degrees of success. The significant differences appear to be in commitment, attitudes, and human skill training. This paper will help to describe some functions, compare some roles and share some concepts and attitudes that hopefully will help view the T/A system in a realistic manner so that success will be enhanced should others try such a program. To be more specific the functions of the new "role" are:

The Human Development function:

During personal and caring relationships through guided activities, skills and abilities are enhanced so that students will become more effective with others, feel good about themselves, and improve communication skills. While developing short and long range goals emphasizing success and achievement, student worth as human beings is clarified, own potential recognized, and plans decided upon for personal enhancement.

"Crisis" Assistance function:

SP 014 050

An atmosphere of trust and mutual confidence resulting from the human development function is conducive to students being open to discussing personal problems. Schools are complex social systems that naturally foster many and sundry intra and inter-personal problem situations seen as "crisis" by students. These problems can be alleviated if not corrected by an empathic, caring, and skillful adult and a safe "home" peer group.

Student - Parent - Teacher Conference function:

Probably the most widely known and accepted function of the T/A system is the meeting that occurs 3 or 4 times a school year with the parent, student, and advisor present. The uniqueness of this conference is that the student reports to the parent with support from the advisor. The two previous functions help set the stage for the trusting and caring teacher/student relationship which allows for honest communication pertaining to the student's scholastic progress, learning styles, social adjustments, courses of studies or whatever - a kind of dialogue that seldom happens without adequate preparation, planning, and role playing practice experiences.

Program Planning function:

The T/A is the central one responsible for planning and coordination the student's learning programs and must include parents and other teachers in addition to the student.

Provided are a time, place, learning facilitator, and activities designed with the help of a consultant not only to facilitate learning, but to facilitate learning how to learn in small group interactions.

Some of the duties of the T/A may be registration, academic difficulties, behavior problems, records (academic, health, etc.), identified special needs, parent - student - teacher conferences, open house, and utilizing holidays, etc., for learning activities.

The process may begin with exercises, games, activities that help to get acquainted or to build trust, openess, listening skills, etc. A concentrated collection of examples of these can be found in Mr. Hubel's books.[1]

Actually the process may begin with an experience, taking an action, or solving a problem. The emphasis is on creative problem-solving with the exploration of alternative approaches and solutions. It involves heightened sensitivity to possible problems and an understanding of the conditions under which certain problems might occur, so that they can be anticipated and solved early before they become too large and possibly polarized.

At points during the problem-solving process, the student proceeds into dilemma, inventive discussion, with feedback and decisions as to new directions

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1. An excellent print resource for activities as well as orientation, etc., is a new book (1976) by Mr. Keigh Hubel of SSU entitled, Teacher Advisor System-In Action.

to take and allows and encourages examination of the process itself as well as the content or results of the process.

As the student is helped to process the experience, he becomes aware of questions unanswered and hypothesis to be tested, his own needs and interests, problems that need solving, actions that should be taken, or experiences he should seek. He then begins planning designs and making the necessary preparations to satisfy these needs and the process begins again.

The Teacher/Advisor:

The T/A serves primarily as facilitator and resource. Much as a coach, in the beginning he provides the rules and structures, he helps each student develop the skills and understanding to plan the game or to perform effectively, and he works with each student to help continuously improve performance. Cooperation and team work are emphasized so that the T/A can assist in the development of each student and each student can contribute as much as possible to the effectiveness of others - alone or in small groups.

But it is the student who is coached who plays the game, and in the experimental T/A system the game is learning. Each student is learning to be an effective learner, and for most students (as well as teachers) experiencing experiential learning is a whole new ball game.

Role Comparisons:

The role of the T/A is different from his role in traditional teaching. The differences are sometimes subtle, but nevertheless important. A comparison might help clarify the differences between the two:

From focusing on the presentation of content, facts, and information toward focusing on the process of learning--learning how to learn.

From assuming the responsibility for deciding what the student needs and motivating him to learn toward involving the student actively in assuming the responsibility for his own learning.

From deciding what the student needs and provides it through lectures, reading assignments, etc. toward helping the student learn to be an active information seeker, identifying and making effective use of available resources.

From expecting the student to learn the material presented, for recall later toward expecting the student to learn to find and use information as needed to solve problems.

From expecting the student to learn primarily by memorization and formulation of responses to questions toward expecting the student to learn by exploration and discovery, asking questions, formulating and testing hypotheses, solving problems.

From focusing on the completion of textbook type exercises or problems with "one right answer" the teacher is the expert toward focusing on the creative process of identifying and solving open-ended, real life problems with many possible solutions. There is no expert.

From formulating objectives, but usually based on covering a specified amount of material toward formulating clearly defined objectives based on the needs of the student.

From expecting the student to accept the objectives specified for the program toward involving the student in the identification of his own learning needs and objectives.

From assessing and evaluates the material he presents, effectiveness of presentation, and performance and progress of each student toward involving the student in assessment and evaluation of the advisee experience, information obtained, and progress toward objectives.

From focusing on performance in relation to the group, with grading on the normal curve toward focusing on individual achievement in relation to the student's own needs and objectives.

From focusing on competition with peers, for achievement, recognition, grades, and other rewards toward focusing on helping the student learn to work effectively with others in cooperative, problem-solving activities.

From Focusing on competition with peers, for achievement, recognition, grades and other rewards toward focusing on group discussion and activities conducted and evaluated by the students themselves.

From focusing on one-way communication from the teacher to the students, with little communication from the students, among students, or even among staff toward working toward open communication between students and the staff, among the staff, and among the students.

From making the decisions or carries out decisions made by the staff; discourages suggestions or criticism from the students toward inviting ideas, suggestions, and criticism from the students; involves the students in decision making.

From establishing formal procedures and control and formal relationships with the students toward encouraging informality and spontaneity; establishes informal relationships with the students.

From requiring respect for the teacher as the authority, distrust of the student's own judgment toward promoting a questioning attitude, constructive discontent, reliance on the student's own judgment.

From promoting competition among students creating a climate of distrust and lack of concern for others; provides feedback to students regarding performance on examinations toward attempting to develop a climate of openness, trust, and concern for others, with maximum feedback to each person of information he needs to evaluate his performance and progress.

From following the schedule closely; avoids problems or dispenses with them quickly so they will not interfere with the schedule toward structuring the interactions so that unplanned and unexpected problems will be treated as learning opportunities.

The role of the teacher in the Teacher/Advisor system is not an easy one

to assume. It represents an entirely new system of attitudes and behaviors. T/A who has tried the experiential approach have found that even if they can accept this approach and their new role intellectually, it is difficult for them to adapt emotionally and behaviorally. Over a period of many years as students and instructors in the traditional education system, they have developed a pattern of conditioned responses to the stimuli of the classroom. This pattern is very difficult to change, particularly when many of the students will resist the change and try to force the T/A back into the familiar, traditional teacher role.

Many teachers have had very little practice with the use of the inductive, discovery, and critical-thinking modes of learning required in the experiential T/A System. They are much more familiar and comfortable with the traditional modes. They need to relearn how to learn,too, in a way that was probably quite natural to them as young children. In many ways, learning in the experiential way is more difficult. It requiresincreased effort, investment, and responsibility. Students will criticize the Teacher/Advisor, sometimes with considerable hostility, for not assuming what they believe to be his responsibility and for trying to force them to assume responsibilities they never had to assume before. They will bait him with questions they themselves could or should answer, and will ask for direction or decisions when they themselves should be deciding. They will try to force the T/A to give them the solution to a problem when they would learn far more by struggling with the solution themselves. It is too easy for the traditional teacher to pick up the bait and do all the things he should not do if he wants to achieve active and responsible participation of his advisees.

The T/A also has to be aware of his own needs in the traditional system--the power he has over students who have to conform to his ways or be punished, the satisfactions he gains from well-organized answers, the security he feels when he is in control of the teacher situations. It is easy for the T/A to fall into the trap of enjoying and perpetuating his position of power, authority, and influence. It is also less threatening to him if he keeps the students at a distance, under control, and thinking and talking about issues with which he is comfortable.

But power is shared in the experiential T/A system. As a result, the learning process may appear to be chaotic and disorganized, it may not follow the schedule, there may be few lectures, and he has to cope with questions as they are formulated by the students and must be willing to admit it if he doesn't have the answer.

Perhaps a more legitimate concern is whether or not the Teacher/Advisor does have information and understanding that could be shared with the students. He will probably want to pass his discoveries and insights on to the students. What he often does not realize, however, is that he may be denying them the same joy of discovery or achievement and the resulting increased understanding and self-esteem that he has experienced. He sometimes forgets too that his own learning has been slow and incremental. He often cannot understand why his very clear and logical explanations are not readily understood and appreciated by his students.

Built into the concept of responsibility for one's own learning in the group is the notion of working together, as peers, to establish learning objectives and needs (individual and group) and ways of assessing performance and progress toward these objectives on a continuous basis. In the experiential T/A System many of the activities involve working together in varied small, task-centered, problem-solving peer group mixes, in which each person can share ideas, opinions, observations, feelings, and reactions with the other participants. Much of the learning results from this group interaction, problem-solving, and analysis and evaluation of experiences. The participants learn to use one another as well as the T/A as valuable learning resources.

With continuous feedback and support from others in the group, the individual learns to experiment with alternative modes of behavior which may be more effective than usual. He learns also to support others in their attempts to experiment and to accept and receive feedback, to communicate with peers and the teaching staff, and to work with others effectively and harmoniously. In so doing, he becomes more sensitive to feedback cues (verbal and nonverbal) in his environment, and learns how to learn from experience, develop a better understanding of what will be required to achieve similar effectiveness in relations with "significant others" including parents and possibly bosses who have other backgrounds, so that he can continue to modify his behavior outside the school program.

The need for a response to societal forces to modify traditional high school teacher roles to produce an environment where students can develop in areas in addition to content seems to be at least partially alleviated and in some cases mostly corrected by incorporating the teacher/advisory system.

With continued risk taking to not only initiate the teacher/advisory system but also to treat it as a process of utilizing research findings for change, interventions can be incorporated as the system develops for continuing the challenging and exciting pursuit.